

MALLARI

Mallari, a temple dance which existed as the first dance before procession of a deity in the temple till 100 years back. This dance was accompanied by Periya mellam, the Nadaswaram orchestra during the temple procession. Usually the Mallari was composed in Ragam Nattai because the olden Tamils believe starting a musical concert with Nattai ragam attracts and sustains the audience zeal but we do have Hundreds of Mallaris in many Ragas and Thalas. Some Particularly compose for the Raga that belongs to the type of deities, the days and festival. This was the foremost dance starting from the place where the deity is abode on the Palanquine or any other vehicle to the entrance of the temple.

This dance has its name coming from “mal” one of the eleven dance forms mentioned in the silapathigaram, the ancient tamil literature which talks about the dance forms a dancer should know in arangaetra kaadai. Mal is wrestling, though it is a warfare it was included in the dance because the movements of to and fro, swinging, rotating, jumping and shaking before wrestling proclaims the laurels, valor and physic of the wrestling warrior. Once there were persons in the temple who have practiced a dance like demonstration of lifting the palanquine and taking it to the entrance of the temple with the Music of Periya Melam. Later on when the Palanquin lifters who were dancing for Mallari was not available, the Female dancers started dancing in some temples. Yet Muthukannu, the devadasi of Viralimalai temple says

that they start their dance from the Pillaiyar(Vinayakar),who was found usually at the right side of the Temple entrance. It was believed that the mallari was played to welcome victorious king or warriors or a hero.

The mallari first starts with the slow rhythm, the same notes increase to highest level and again coming back to the slow rhythm with simple notes .In olden days as soon as the mallari was completed the dancers immediately starts alaripu as in Viralimalai temple but in some places Alaripu was danced when the deity is placed on the Mandapam,the dancers danced mallari completing with Alaripu which were both a sudha nritta(pure dance).The Mallari dance form has vanished from the temple premises after 1947 but the nadaswaram still exist in the temples and temple processions . Now surprisingly Mallari has returned to the entertainment side of dance on the stage with new choreographies sometimes even with slogans.